DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 766 CS 507 513

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TITLE "Talking Good": Family Communication and Children's Morality.
PUB DATE 24 May 91
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (41st, Chicago, IL, May 23-27, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Influence; *Interpersonal Communication; Models; *Moral Development; *Moral Values; *Parent Child Relationship; Peer Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Family Communication; *Moral Reasoning; Piaget (Jean); Transactive Communication

ABSTRACT

The contemporary influence on the study of child morality has come from the cognitive-stage theories of Jean Piaget, who skewed the focus on interpersonal communication away from the family to the peer play domain. Aside from this approach, there are two other psychological approaches to moral development: psychoanalytic theory and social learning theory. Furthermore, the theories on parenting or discipline style and family systems are less theoretically grounded, but nonetheless influential approaches. Another way to examine parental effects on moral development is by focusing on outcomes--on the different dimensions of moral development, such as altruism. Despite the Piagetian bias against parental nurturance, researchers have found that loving parents at higher stages of development who explain their parenting behaviors to their children and who encourage their children to participate in family discussions of moral issues and to consider multiple perspectives are more likely to have children who can reason at more mature moral stages. In addition, when parents are trained to discuss moral issues with their children more openly, the children's moral reasoning development is accelerated. As a direct response to the school-based attempts to accelerate children's and adolescents' moral reasoning development, M. W. Berkowitz and J. C. Gibbs developed a model of moral discussion behavior termed "transactive discussion." Subsequent research projects on this model suggest that adolescents discuss moral issues differently with parents than with peers, but that the effect of the family on the children's moral development is a strong one. (Fifty references are attached.) (PRA)

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"TALKING GOOD": FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND CHILDREN'S MORALITY

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CS507513

Paper presented at the conference of the International Communication Association, Chicago, May 24, 1991

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Developmental psychology has been slow to recognize the centrality of communication in the study of human growth. This is likely the case in part because of the positivist, behaviorist orientation that has dominated American psychology for much of its history. Despite such biases, developmental psychologists have now begun to explore the role of interpersonal communication in shaping human psychological development. Two social contexts have shown particular promise for such analyses, especially when studying the development of children: the school and the family. In both of these cases, communication among children (classmates or siblings) and between children and adults (teachers or parents) has been found to have a profound influence on the way that children develop a broad variety of characteristics, e.g., language skills (Nelson, 1976), competence (Baumrind, 1971), self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967), etc. One aspect of child development that has only very recently been studied from the point of view of interpersonal communication is moral development.

The study of moral development has taken a somewhat circuitous path in this focus on interpersonal communication. The central contemporary influence on the study of child morality has come from the cognitive-stage theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. Piaget (1965) skewed the focus on interpersonal communication away from the family domain to the peer play domain. His argument, largely as a counterpoint to the work of Durkheim (1961), was that families constrained children's moral reasoning development by virtue of the hierarchical nature of their communications. That is, children were relatively powerless in the family system and this limited the degree to which they could directly and effectively enter into family communications about moral issues. Indeed, recent research by Kruger (1991, in press; Kruger & Tomasello, 1986) demonstrates that young girls do act more assertively and openly in moral discussions with peers than with their own mothers. Unfortunately, however, Piaget's bias became reified in the literature and, as astonishing as it may seem, families were largely neglected as a force in

children's moral reasoning development for decades. Kohlberg (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), the theorist who extended and elaborated Piaget's initial study of the development of moral reasoning capacity, also extended the bias against studying family dynamics including communication patterns. Whereas Kruger's research suggests that kids communicate differently with peers than with parents, and even that the peer communication style is more developmentally stimulating, this should not lead to the conclusion that child-parent communication is impotent in children's moral development. Indeed, Kruger (in press), as we shall see in a later section, identifies the types of parent-child communications that are developmentally stimulating.

THEORIES OF PARENT EFFECTS ON CHILD MORALITY

The cognitive-stage approach is not the only approach that developmental psychologists have utilized to understand the development of morality in childhood. It may be useful to take a moment to explore the three different predominant psychological approaches to moral development, their findings, and their emphases or lack of emphasis on interpersonal communication as a factor in children's moral growth. Psychoanalytic theory contends that morality develops in children through the formation of a superego or conscience in the preschool years. This conscience is assumed to be a rigid internalization of one's same sex parent's values and morals as a defensive resolution of the Oedipal psychosexual crisis. It is assumed that the threat of parental withdrawal of love will lead to the greatest internalization of moral standards (Sears, Maccoby & Levin, 1957); however, research suggests that parental induction, an alternative form of parenting, leads to higher levels of internalization of moral standards (Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967). It is important to note that the central element in induction is for parents to add a communicative strand to their discipline and other parenting behavior; i.e.,

inductive parents **explain** their parenting behavior to their children, rather than simply imposing the behavior without explanation. As we shall see a bit later, induction consistently appears as an important and positive variable in family communication for child moral development, or, as Lickona (1983) calls it, Raising Good Children.

Another common theoretical perspective is social learning theory. This model suggests that children develop their moral characteristics by observing others behaving in moral or immoral ways. The ability to control one's impulses has been related to observing adults control their impulses (Bandura & Mischel, 1965) and verbalize and externalize their reflective thoughts (Ross & Ross, 1976). On the other hand, child aggression and later abusive behavior increase with parents who demonstrate the same types of behavior (e.g., Allinsmith & Greening, 1955). Furthermore, the literature clearly demonstrates that children learn more from what models do than what they say, although as we shall see parental communication is also important in child development.

The cognitive-stage theory, as already noted, approaches moral development as the growth of rational moral reasoning capacities. Kohlberg (1984) has described six stages of moral reasoning development that represent a universal sequence of increasingly more adequate ways of reasoning about and solving moral problems. The process by which one moves through this sequence of stages and by which stage development may be remediated or facilitated clearly has a communicative component (Berkowitz, 1985). At the core of all moral education programs is peer moral dilemma discussion. As noted, this bias toward studying peer interactive effects has also been manifested as a neglect of family effects. Nonetheless, a body of literature has demonstrated that parents who use open communicative discipline styles tend to have children at higher stages of moral reasoning (e.g., Parikh, 1980).

Two additional approaches to this question are also worth exploring at this juncture. A less theoretically grounded, but nonetheless influential, approach to parental effects on children's moral development focuses on parenting style or discipline style. Whereas a variety of models of parenting style exist, the most widely employed model is that of Diana Baumrind (1971), built upon the earlier work of Schaefer (1959). Baumrind describes four dimensions of parenting. The dimensions are Control (allowing child autonomy vs. controlling children's behaviors), Nurturance (warm and loving vs. distant and hostile), Clarity of Communication (degree to which parents solicit the child's opinion and explain their own parenting behavior to the child), and Maturity Demands (degree of parental expectations that their children perform up to their highest potential). From these four dimensions, Baumrind derives three predominant parenting styles. Authoritarian parents are highly controlling and demanding but hostile and uncommunicative. Permissive parents tend to be loving and communicative but wield little control and set little demands for mature behavior. Authoritative parents are loving, controlling, communicative, and set high maturity demands. More positive child personality constellations, including such morally-relevant traits as friendliness and cooperativeness, are associated with the authoritative parenting style than with the other two styles. Of most interest in this analysis is the Clarity of Communication dimension, which includes what we have already termed induction. To demonstrate the power of open parent-child communication, we can look at the different effects of overly controlling parents who do or do not use induction. Highly controlling non-inductive parents tend to have children who are suggestible, withdrawn, uncreative, and unaffectionate. Highly controlling inductive parents tend to have children who are competent and assertive. One interpretation is that induction is not only a positive parenting characteristic in its own right, but may also have an ameliorating effect on some negative parental characteristics.

A final approach is that of family systems theory. Peterson, Hey and Peterson (1979) have tried to integrate family systems theory with Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning development.

> The family's chief developmental task is then to encourage [moral] development and create family interaction patterns that enhance growth. If the parents value flexible thought patterns, social contracts, and autonomous behavior, they will more likely use flexible interaction structures (person-oriented) and facilitate the child's mental growth to match their stage levels. If the parents conform rigidly to others' expectations of "good families" (age-scripted, position-oriented families), they will be more likely to create family structures unable to accommodate adolescent postconventional thought behavior. Consequently, the family may impede mental restructuring and growth among its members in order to attain its goal of close fit with the family's social set. (p. 233)

As the authors suggest, the family's communication patterns may (1) reflect the family's "stage" of moral reasoning, and (2) consequently favor communication patterns that reflect that structure of moral reasoning. The result is either a stimulation or blocking of child moral reasoning development.

PARENTING EFFECTS ON CATEGORIES OF CHILD MORALITY

A second way of examining the effects of parents on children's moral development is by focusing on outcomes, i.e., on the different dimensions of children's moral development. Psychologists have employed a broad array of definitions/dimensions of morality. Perhaps the most widely accepted dimension is altruism, typically defined as self-sacrifice for another's benefit or helping another at some cost to oneself. Altruism is increased in children whose parents moralize with strong affective tones, are nurturant, model altruistic behavior, are authoritative, and who set high standards for their children and train the children to be able to meet those standards (Baumrind, 1971; Whiting & Whiting, 1973; Yarrow, Scott & Waxler, 1973; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow & King, 1979). As noted earlier, internalized moral

standards are supported by parenting that relies on induction (Hoffman & Saltzstein, 1967) and avoids power assertion (Allinsmith & Greening, 1955). Social activists report having parents who practiced and preached morality and lived up to their ideals (London, 1960; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Rosenhan, 1969). More mature moral reasoning is found in children whose parents use induction, encourage their children's expression of their own opinions, have higher stages of moral reasoning themselves, experienced disagreements with them, were affectionate, were affectively supportive of their children in family discussions, were more religiously committed, and exposed them to moral concepts and humanitarian ideas (Doebert & Nunner-Winkler, 1985; Haan, Smith & Block, 1968; Holstein, 1976; Parikh, 1980; Peterson et al., 1979; Powers, 1982; Shoffeit, 1971; Speicher-Dubin, 1982; Thorlindsson & Wieting, 1981).

Once again we can observe a consistent pattern of family communication styles that emerges from this very disparate set of studies of children's and adolescents' moral development. It is clear that parents who are willing to verbalize the rationales for their parenting behavior and to welcome their children's input into discussions of moral issues as well as to teach/preach to their children about moral issues tend to have more altruistic, internalized, humanitarian children who can reason about moral issues in more mature ways.

ANATOMY OF THE COMMUNICATIVE ELEMENT IN PARENTING FOR MORALITY

In order to better understand how these communicative patterns produce moral maturity, it is necessary to take a more detailed look at part of this relation. We will use the example of parent-child communication and its effect on the development of stages of moral reasoning to achieve this end. Toward this end, we will present an historical account of the study of parent communication and its effect on child moral reasoning development.

A debate had developed during the 1950's and 1960's about which parenting styles led to moral development, and in the 1970's this debate was largely resolved by Hoffman's (1970) report that affection and induction, rather than the psychoanalytically predicted love withdrawal or the behaviorist expectation for power assertion, were most closely associated with moral development of children. Nonetheless, the operationalization of moral development was typically restricted to either the internalization of moral standards or an empathic concern for others. As noted earlier, Piaget (1965) had largely divorced the moral reasoning development focus from considerations of parenting effects; however, the discovery of induction as an predictor of child moral development is much more consistent with the cognitive-stage school of thought than it is with either the psychoanalytic or social learning traditions (Speicher, 1987). As Speicher notes, the cognitive-stage model emphasizes the importance of opportunities for role-taking especially in social confrontations and discussions of moral dilemmas. Induction is quite consistent with this emphasis in its characteristics of open discussion of moral issues in parenting.

Despite the Piagetian bias against parental nurturance of moral reasoning capacities, a few researchers began to explore exactly that relation in the 1970's. Speicher (1987) points out that these researchers utilized four variables that capture the parent dimensions that may affect children's moral reasoning development: (1) parent discipline style; (2) the affectional nature of the parent-child relationship; (3) observations of the parents' stimulation of their children's moral reasoning; (4) parents' stages of moral reasoning. Whereas all are of general interest, it is variables 1 and 3 that are of most direct relevance to this discussion, by virtue of their communicative elements.

Speicher (1987) has reviewed most of the relevant studies and reaches the following conclusions. (1) Power assertive and love withdrawal parental discipline styles do not promote

and may even inhibit children's moral reasoning development (Holstein, 1976; Parikh, 1980; Shoffeit, 1971). (2) Induction is positively related to moral reasoning development in children (Parikh, 1980; Shoffeit, 1971). (3) Parental warmth seems to positively moderate the relationship between parenting styles and child moral reasoning development (Holstein, 1976; Shoffeit, 1971). (4) Parents' tendencies to engage in communicative styles that stimulate children's role-taking opportunities were positively related to children's moral reasoning development. This was found for parents' tendencies to encourage children's participation in family moral discussions (Holstein, 1976; Parikh, 1980) and parents' use of reasoning that considers more than one perspective (Powers, 1982). (5) Parents' stages of moral reasoning development were positively related to children's stages of moral reasoning (Haan, Langer & Kohlberg, 1976; Holstein, 1976; Parikh, 1980; Powers, 1982; Shoffeit, 1971).

An additional study not reviewed by Speicher is an unpublished dissertation by Peterson (1976). As noted earlier, Peterson attempts to integrate family systems theory with moral stage theory. She reports that adolescent moral reasoning stages were higher in families that exhibited parental support, long discussions of moral issues, and religious commitment. Moral stage was lower if fathers used power assertion and mothers used love withdrawal. Surprisingly, parental induction was not related to adolescent moral reasoning.

We therefore may conclude that loving parents at higher stages of development who explain their parenting behaviors to their children and who encourage their children to participate in family discussions of moral issues and to consider multiple perspectives are more likely to have children who can reason at more mature moral stages. It is clear that parents at higher stages also tend to use more inductive and openly communicative parenting strategies and to be more supportive of each other and of their children (Parikh, 1980; Peterson, 1976). This and the fact that all of the studies reviewed were correlational in nature makes it difficult to

determine which, if any, of these parenting dimensions cause moral reasoning development in children. To unpack this confound, it is necessary to turn to the few parent training studies that have been done. Research has clearly demonstrated that when parents are trained to discuss moral issues with their children more openly, the children's moral reasoning development is accelerated (Azrak, 1980; Grimes, 1974; Stanley, 1980). This offers strong support for the conclusion that family communication styles about moral issues directly affect the development of moral reasoning capacities in children. Nevertheless, these studies give only minimal insight into the precise nature of developmentally productive family communication patterns. We will therefore next explore a line of research that focuses on analyses of specific communicative behaviors related to moral discussion and that has been related in a number of recent studies to parent-child moral communication.

TRANSACTIVE PARENT-CHILD DISCUSSION AND CHILD MORAL REASONING

As a direct response to the school-based attempts to accelerate children's and adolescents' moral reasoning development (e.g., Blatt & Kohlberg, 1975; Colby, Kohlberg, Fenton, Speicher-Dubin & Lieberman, 1977) and to certain laboratory studies of moral stage theory (Rest, 1973; Rest, Turiel & Kohlberg, 1969; Turiel, 1966), Berkowitz and Gibbs (1979, 1983) developed a model of moral discussion behavior termed transactive discussion. Transactive discussion is defined as discussion behaviors in which the speaker re-presents (paraphrases) or active operates on (analyzes, extends, etc.) the reasoning of a co-discussant. Research has demonstrated that such behavior increases the developmental effects of peer moral discussions (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983).

The modal form of developmentally stimulating child and adolescent peer transactive discussion can best be described as argumentative; i.e., the developmentally most productive discussions among peers tended to be competitive intellectual exchanges where each discussant appeared motivated to "win" the argument by supporting his or her own position and revealing the weaknesses of the co-discussants' positions. It was therefore somewhat naively assumed that this same communicative style would apply to family developmental discussions and their impact on children's moral reasoning development. Three separate research projects have now explored the applicability of transactive discussion to parent-child interactions.

Powers (1982) examined the moral trialogues of adolescents and their parents in the context of a larger longitudinal study of adolescent moral and ego development. As part of her analysis of the moral discussions, Powers utilized the transact model. She reports that transaction is only weakly related to adolescent moral stage and competitive transaction is associated with moderate levels of adolescent moral reasoning. The greatest moral development is found in families that are supportive (i.e., show encouragement, use non-competitive humor, and engage in much listening) and that share perspectives (i.e., state their opinions, express agreement, clarify their positions, and request others' positions). It should be pointed out, however, that Powers only used a subset of the transactive discussion coding categories in her analyses.

Kruger, in a series of studies (Kruger, 1991, in press; Kruger & Tomasello, 1986), has attempted to directly test Piaget's contention that moral discussion with peers is developmentally more stimulating than moral discussion with parents. Indeed, her analyses of 7- and 10-year-old girls' discussions either with their mother or best friend strongly support Piaget's position. Not only do girls make more self-generated and other-oriented transacts with peers (Kruger & Tomasello, 1986), but discussions with peers also lead to greater moral reasoning development

and this development seems directly related to the transactive nature of peer discussion (Kruger, in press).

In a longitudinal study of 7- to 16-year-old children and their parents, Walker (1990; Walker & Taylor, in press) also used the transact model to examine the developmentally stimulating features of family discussion of real and hypothetical moral problems. Using an adapted version of Powers' (1982) coding scheme including the full complement of transactive categories, Walker and Taylor report that children's moral development was best predicted by a pattern of parents' discussion most centrally characterized by three elements: "Socratic" questioning, supportive interactions, presentations of higher stage moral reasoning. It is also important to note that they report that it was the discussion of a real dilemma generated by the child that best predicted the child's subsequent (over two years) moral reasoning development and that the developmentally richest moral discussions were characterized by parents' supportive interactions and re-presentational transaction (as opposed to competitive analytical transaction).

These three research projects, while not revealing perfect unanimity, do suggest some important trends. First, children and adolescents discuss moral issues differently with parents than with peers. With the former, children tend to be more passive and reactive and parents more directing. With the latter, discussions are more symmetrical and confrontational. While discussions with peers tend to be more developmentally stimulating, simply transposing the competitive analytical peer interaction style to family moral discussions does not improve the developmental richness of parent-child moral communication. Rather, it appears that a different communicative style is developmentally stimulating in family discussions. That style is for parents to be affectively supportive, to present and clarify their own moral positions, and to elicit their children's moral positions. From our earlier discussion, we can readily see that these findings are consistent with the previous studies of parental style and child moral development

that demonstrated that a parental communicative style of induction and open encouragement of egalitarian family discussions of moral issues produced the most morally mature children. The recipe for, as Lickona (1983) has labeled it, Raising Good Children is becoming quite clear.

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